

Changing Dynamics of Urbanisation in India:
A Need to Address the Neglected Census Towns and Large Settlements

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Abstract:

The recent surge in India's urbanisation on account of the growth of Census Towns (CTs) amid 2001–2011 Census has raised alarming concerns with respect to delivery of urban services, governance and most importantly urban planning. This paper attempts to highlight the dynamics associated with CTs and large and very large villages — “grey areas” which are defined or governed as rural but have urban-like characteristics. The emphasis of this paper is to present the paradoxical status associated with these settlements and, at the same time, highlight the rural-urban conundrum.

The process of identification of CTs takes place in the pre-census period. The 2011 Census identified 2532 new CTs, with the total CTs (3894) accounting for 49.1% of the total towns in the country and 14.4 % of the urban population. Further, 2231 new CTs are likely to emerge in the new Census according to Roy and Pradhan (2018). Additionally, 15% of India's population is residing in very large and large villages (with a population > 5000). Given this background, the paper highlights the need to put in place suitable governance structures for these settlements which can encompass the key principles of Sustainable Developments Goals (SDGs), preparing these settlements to put in place plans for climate change, enhancing the liveability for the people and creating resilient, sustainable towns and communities in the future.

Keywords - Urbanisation, Census Towns, Large settlements, Governance, Sustainability and Liveability

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1. Introduction to the Dynamics of Urbanisation in India

Urban settings are heterogeneous and complex in nature and this can be seen in the Indian context, not only with respect to India's definition of urban, but also in terms of the nature of urban governance as applicable for the statutory towns and census towns. While the 2011 Census highlights that India was 31.16 % urban, with a population of 377 million people, the World Bank 2019 data reveals that India's urbanisation has inched to 34% (471 million). Likewise, the McKinsey Global Institute Report (2010) has projected India's urban population to increase to 590 million by 2030, while the World Urbanisation Prospects (2014) highlights India's urban numbers to scale up to 814 million by 2050.

In 2007, the world for the first time became more urban — wherein urban population exceeded the rural population, and according to the World Bank (2019), 55.7% of the world population was living in urban areas. However, a closer examination of the pace of India's urbanisation in comparison with BRIICS⁴ and select South Asian Economies in 2019, revealed the following: Brazil was (86.6%) urban, Russian Federation (75%), India (34%), Indonesia (56%), China (60%), South Africa (67%), indicating a much lower level of urbanisation in India. This is also seen while comparing India with some of the large South Asian Economies wherein both Bangladesh and Pakistan (37%) had a higher level of urbanisation. It should also be noted that each country has differing criteria for defining and classifying an area as urban, which makes cross country comparisons difficult. However, in terms of sheer numbers, India (471 million), has the second largest urban population after China (865 million).

The Census of India (2011) defines urban which includes:

i) **Statutory Towns (STs)** “are notified under law by the concerned State/UT Government and have local bodies like municipal corporations, municipalities, municipal committees, etc., irrespective of their demographic characteristics”;

ii) **Census Towns (CTs)** which includes all other places satisfying the following criteria:

- “A minimum population of 5,000; at least 75 percent of the male main working population engaged in non-agricultural pursuits; and a density of population of at least 400 persons

³ Large settlements in this paper refers to large and very large villages with a population greater than 5000

⁴ BRIICS - Brazil, Russia, India, Indonesia, China and South Africa

per sq. km.” The second classification (as mentioned in the second item here) is identified as a “Census Town.”

This brings us to address an important question: how urban is India? As per the 2011 Census, India was 31.16 % urban, but according to the Registrar General, administratively the country was only 26.31 % urban—administered by urban local bodies (ULBs) as decided by the respective State Governments. To what extent is India urban being a matter of much debate, has seen multiple perspectives discussed below.

1.1 Alternative Perspectives of How Urban is India

A study by Uchida and Nelson (2010) reveals that 42.9% of the Indian population could be considered as urban, using the 2001 Census data, since they live within an hour’s commute of a large town (with 100,000 people or more). However, as per the 2001 Census, the official urbanisation rate was 27.8%. Another study by Denis and Marius-Gnanou (2011) highlights India’s urbanisation at 42 % for 2011. According to their methodology, if the distance between the built-up area of two settlements (leaving aside the rural-urban classification) does not exceed 200 m, such neighborhoods are treated as components of the same “settlement agglomeration (SA).”

Chomitz et al. (2005) and Uchida and Nelson (2008) used the “agglomeration index (AI)” to draw a cross-country and cross-regional comparison of the urban population distribution. Their estimates revealed that 52% of the population in India lived within an hour’s distance to large cities (threshold of 50,000 or more) based on the 2001 Census. Their method applies three factors: “population density (at least 150 people per square kilometer), a threshold population of a large urban center (50,000), and a maximum travel time of 60 minutes” to the urban centre.

On the other hand, “subaltern urbanisation” implies the unregulated mushrooming of urban clusters—that are not considered urban according to the Census classification criteria—as highlighted by Mukhopadhyay et al. (2012). These agglomeration settlements are in the form of large masses of people living in close proximity, wherein such settlements are majorly driven via market and historic force, and are independent of the mega cities; the independence from metropolis and autonomy are the key features of subaltern urbanisation.

Another measure used is the satellite images of built-up areas, wherein India’s urbanisation rate stood at 63.02% in 2011. Satellite images provide higher spatial and temporal resolution than administrative data, and are extremely pertinent for the study of urban dynamics, urban sprawl, its ensuing effects on land use policies, and the effects of infrastructure on urbanisation and economic activity (Vogel et al., 2019; Goldblatt et al., 2019). On the other hand, if only a population or density parameter—of using a threshold population of 5000+ is considered, then the alternate estimate of urbanisation for India in 2011 would be 47.2% (Sreevatsan, 2017). However, the 2020 World Bank study undertaken by Galdo et al. (2020) pooled diverse evaluation of Google images that involved a specimen of places in India along with several additional noticeable features and

evidence. These included—satellite imageries, density of population, night lights, and so forth. The findings of their paper revealed a slightly lower rate of urbanisation at 29.9 % when compared with the 2011 Census. In addition, the paper also highlighted numerous habitations that were considered to be rural settlements but had urban characteristics, while several dwellings which could be categorized as "other cities" and "census towns" but were identified as rural. There are significant connotations in the manner in which these towns are considered as urban—with rural governance—once again throwing up the ambiguity regarding urbanisation in India.

This anomaly brings us to Dujne (2017) statement highlighting that while the census is an important source of data for investigating general trends in urbanisation, it should be complemented by additional perspectives and not be the sole source for making strong claims about the urban. This also brings us to the point that there are cross-country variations in the definition of “urban” as there is no standard definition (United Nations, 2010). Many countries define urban areas based on the minimum population size—Denmark (200), Argentina (2,000), Japan (50,000), China (100,000) and India (5,000). Few nations adopt administrative framework to define urban areas while others apply the employment as per the sectors or the delivery of basic infrastructure and amenities to identify the settlements as rural or urban as discussed by Dijkstra et al. (2020). To address the varying definitions and to facilitate comparisons across national borders, six global bodies outlined a distinct classification and identified these settlements (Dijkstra et al., 2020) as:

- i. “Cities, which have a population of at least 50,000 inhabitants in contiguous dense grid cells (>1,500 inhabitants per sq km);
- ii. Towns and semi-dense areas, which have a population of at least 5,000 inhabitants in contiguous grid cells with a density of at least 300 inhabitants per sq km; and
- iii. Rural areas, which consist mostly of low-density grid cells.”

The new definition has several improvements as it facilitates ease and clarity of urban being impelled by the size of populace and density. Further, it captures agglomerations economies, is cost effective and above all helps monitor the progress on SDGs on a global scale.

Given the fact that India has deferred its 16th Census Round by a year to 2021 on account of the pandemic, this leaves the researchers to pose an important question, which is a matter of future research and deliberations— *to explore if this global definition can be adopted to measure the extent of urbanisation in India*. This may help address all the inconsistencies and anomalies that arise out of the stringent definition of urbanisation as applied across the various census operations.

The present paper discusses the dynamism associated with urbanisation in India with special reference to the Census Towns (CTs) and large settlements, which have urban-like characteristics. While section one of the paper gives a background of urbanisation in India and the challenges associated with the definition of urban, the following segment throws light on the CTs and large settlements in India and the dynamic issues related to them. Section three of the study

shares an elaborate framework, which has emerged from the 18 functions of ULBs, the select SDG indicators preparing such large settlements for 2030, and also including the various dimensions of liveability index initiated since 2018 by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs. The final segment of the paper puts forth certain crucial recommendations so that the grey middle of urban-rural is not neglected and has measurable outcomes for creating the future ready—sustainable and resilient small towns and communities which can be considered a strong strategy for growth and dispersion of population from dense cities to small towns.

2. Census Towns and Large Settlements

2.1 Background

The process of identification and classification of CTs has been followed since the 1961 Census operation. The identification of CTs takes place in the pre-census instead of the post-census stage. Census Towns (CTs) are areas not defined by the State as urban, but have urban-like characteristics (as defined in the earlier section).

Census 2011, revealed a surge in the number of CTs in India (Refer to Table 1).

Table 1: Growth of Statutory and Census Town

Census Years	Number of Statutory Towns (STs)	Number of Census Towns (CTs)	% shift in CTs	Total of ST & CT	Share of CTs to total Towns
1981	2758	1271	-	4029	31.5
1991	2987	1702	33.9%	4689	36.3
2001	3880	1362	(- 20%)	5242	26.0
2011	4041	3894	186%	7935	49.1

Source: Various Census Reports

It can be observed that the 3894 CTs account for 49.1% of the total towns in the country and 14.4 % (54.28 million) of the urban population as per the 2011 census, which grew from 5% according to the 1991 census. Further, while there were 2742 new CTs in the 2011 Census, 2532 were recognised as CTs that emerged from villages, 141 towns were converted to either outgrowth or STs, while the status of 48 was not known. The new CTs added in 2011 accounted for a total population of 30.38 million.

The state of West Bengal had the highest number of CTs (780), and in terms of percentage share of total population living in CTs—the figure stood at 23.5%. The same has been highlighted for

other states— Kerala (461, 64.6%), Tamil Nadu (376, 14.3%) Maharashtra (278, 7.9%), Uttar Pradesh (267, 8%) and Andhra Pradesh (228, 14.6%). There is an absence of uniformity in relation to the number of CTs in a state and in terms of percentage share of total population living in CTs as per the study conducted by Roy and Pradhan (2018) and Kumar (2019).

Pradhan (2013) pointed out that 37.2% of the CTs were in close proximity to Class I⁵ Towns and possess characteristics and potential for future economic growth. Using the same methodology, Roy and Pradhan (2018) pointed out that 2231 new CTs that are likely to emerge by 2021 Census⁶ having a population of 17.9 million. It was also observed that these new CTs, when compared with their rural neighbourhood are economically better off, with more than 40% of them being in contiguity to Class I towns, while many are growing in the shadow of older CTs. The authors however, expressed their doubts of absorbing rural labour in non-farm activities as employment stability is absent. But with the help of NSSO data in a study conducted by Mehrotra (2019), the paper highlights a strong shift of labour outside agriculture, over the period 2005-18 (Refer to Table 2).

Table 2: Sectoral Employment Trends in India 2005-2018

	Absolute Numbers (in million)					
	Overall Population			Youths (15 to 29 years)		
	2004-05	2011-12	2017-18	2004-05	2011-12	2017-18
Total employment	459.4	474.2	465.1	154.2	138.0	115.7
Unemployed	10.8	10.6	30.1	8.9	9.0	25.1
Labour force	470.2	484.8	495.1	163.1	147.0	140.7
Sectors	Share of workers (in %)					
Agriculture	58.5	48.9	44.1	55.6	44.0	36.1
Manufacturing	11.7	12.6	12.1	14.5	16.1	16.0
Non-manufacturing	6.4	11.7	12.7	7.5	14.0	15.4
Service	23.4	26.8	31.1	22.4	25.9	32.5
Labour Force Participation Rate (%)	43.0	39.5	36.9	56.4	44.6	38.3

Source: Mehrotra (2019)

Table 2 reveals that 63.4 million left agriculture over a period of 12 years and this is also observed for 43.9 million youth population engaged in agriculture. Thus, the percentage share of labour

⁵ Classification of Towns as per Census 2011 includes: Class I (1 lakh and above), Class II (50,000 to 99,999), Class III (20,000 to 49,999), Class IV (10,000 to 19,999), Class V (5,000 to 9,999), Class VI (less than 5,000)

⁶ The first phase of the Census Operations for 2021, which was scheduled between April - September, has been postponed on account of the COVID 19 outbreak

involved in farming plummeted from 58.5% in 2004-05 to 44.1 % by 2017-18, while the youth involved in agriculture sank from 55.6% to 36.1%. Hence, the benchmark of 75% of the male workforce occupied in agriculture has declined tremendously and may have contributed to the transformation of these areas into CTs.

Another study conducted by IndiaSpend (2019) highlighted 190 million population living in 24,000 “large” and “very large” villages as grey settlements in the Census 2011. This is a very critical issue of how a large population residing in either CTs or large and very large villages may be denied basic amenities, public services, accommodation or employment posing a liveability and vulnerability challenge.

Table 3 depicts India’s population spread across various settlement types, with 15% of the population living in large villages which may or may not qualify or be classified as urban as per the stringent definition mentioned earlier. A 2021 projection for the same settlement size estimates a vulnerable population of about 208 million, which is likely to experience compromised basic civic service delivery and poor liveability as these settlements are defined as rural, but are in urgent need of urban amenities.

Table 3: Distribution of Population by Settlement Size (Percentage)

Settlement Size/ Year	2011	2021
Million-plus cities (Population > 10 lakh)	12	13
Other Class-I cities (Population > 1 lakh)	10	11
Class II towns (Population > 50k)	4	4
Class III towns (Population > 20k)	4	4
Class IV, V and VI towns (Population between 5k and 20k)	4	4
Very large and large villages (Population > 5k)	15	15
Medium sized villages (Population > 2k)	23	22
Small villages (Population > 1k)	16	15
Hamlets (Population < 1k)	12	12

Source: Jana & Malladi (2015)

The governance of CTs passes through the Panchayati Raj system which is embodied with a three-tiered structure (1) Gram Panchayats, (2) Panchayat Samiti and (3) District level bodies. The 73rd and 74th Constitution Amendment Act (CAA) were passed in 1992 to address the issue of unplanned growth; these Acts are followed by the rural and urban local bodies (ULBs) in accordance with the 11th⁷ and 12th⁸ schedule of the constitution respectively. The governance of CTs while defined as urban is subject to rural bodies, Article 243G of the constitution, which

⁷ 11th schedule of 73rd Amendment Act, Directives for Panchayats Article 243G, <http://www.mea.gov.in/Images/pdf1/S11.pdf>

⁸ 12th schedule of 74th Amendment Act, Directives for Urban Body <http://legislative.gov.in/constitution-seventy-fourth-amendment-act-1992>

entrusts the panchayats for implementing schemes in accordance with the framework which includes 29 components, facilitating economic development and social justice (73rd Amendment Act,1992). The same e-governance structure is applicable to all the villages.

2.2 Dynamics of Census Towns and Large Settlements

Various studies have analysed the dynamic complexities and numerous issues related with CTs that have emerged over the years and have been briefly highlighted in this section:

i) Bhagat (2011) was of the view that the emerging new CTs in 2011, were an outcome of “net rural-urban classification and rural-urban migration. Since the components of urban growth include a) natural increase in population b) Net rural-urban classification (boundary change and reclassification) and c) rural to urban migration - it was observed that the natural increase in urban population declined from 62% in 1981-91 to 44% in 2001-2011, while the contribution of net rural-urban classification and rural-to-urban migration increased from 42% in 1991-2001 to 56% in 2001-2011”.

ii) The absolute growth of CTs was on account of metamorphosing of places from rural to urban (Mukhopadhyaya, 2017).

iii) Kumar (2019) stated that most of the CTs that emerged in 2001 and 2011 were on account of large villages being upgraded or recognised as CTs.

iv) According to Roy and Pradhan (2018), the identification of CTs takes place in the pre-census stage, and this methodology has led to severe misclassification of CTs in the past, i.e., 736 villages identified as CTs were not fulfilling the criteria, while on the other hand 1400 villages which were fully eligible to be classified as CTs remained unidentified

iv) Karmakar (2015) and Kumar (2019) highlighted that massive numbers of rural people are shifting from agriculture to non-agricultural sectors such as construction trade and manufacturing. This is also seen in Table 2 (Mehrotra, 2019). Further this trend was witnessed in West Bengal due to a substantial shift of male workforce to the tertiary sector from agriculture and related activities.

v) Chakraborty (2017) states that the new CTs created have given rise to a few hypotheses about the emerging urbanisation patterns, like exclusionary urbanisation, peri-urbanisation, growing commuting and short-term migration. This stems from Kundu (2011) which stated that large metropolis like Kolkata, Mumbai, Hyderabad, Chennai and some others have witnessed a drop in the population growth in the past ten years on account of a slowdown in the in-migration due to formalisation, making these large cities less impressive for the marginalised segment of society.

vi) Aijaz (2019) in his study of peri-urban areas highlighted the neglect of CTs on account of absence of urban governments, resulting in to poor liveability, as the existing governance structures are unable to deal with the process of urban transformation. This argument is also put forward by Mukhopadhyay et al (2016) in their study of CTs, undertaken in the select states of Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha and West Bengal.

vii) Hiranandani et al. (2016) revealed that definitions of rural and urban have various implications: a) the definition of rural helps in categorising the eligible beneficiaries of one of the largest employment guarantee programmes, Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) introduced since 2006, as well as other state and central schemes b) while the inclusion of CTs as urban may result in loss of benefits to the citizens; certain funds may be allocated to settlements that are actually urban but are classified as rural c) loss of basic service delivery to these settlements due to they not being recognised as urban. Their paper suggests that in order to identify beneficiaries for the government schemes and social services, it is important to tap objective yardsticks such as poverty rates and fraction of agriculture workers to determine their eligibility.

viii) While rural to urban migration accounts for nearly 78 million people as per 2011 census data of the total 455.8 million internal migration in India, Sudhaman (2019) highlights that 57% of migration is on account of people moving from small to bigger villages in search of employment opportunities outside the farm sector. The problem with CTs is that they are governed like villages by the rural panchayats, unlike Statutory Towns – as they are administered by ULBs.

ix) Kumar (2019) highlights that CTs have grown haphazardly without integrated planning for roads, water supply or sewerage. This is an outcome of these towns being a contiguous combination of several panchayats not capable of funding their development requirements or equipped with resources to support densification of such settlements, thus lacking appropriate governance and integrated regulation, resulting in a “governance fracture.” He therefore recommends that well developed CTs should be provided with an annual development outlay of approximately Rs. 60 crores over a decade, which will help create the much needed urban amenities and infrastructure and can result in the investment multiplier effect, not only leading to development and growth, but also likely to generate and promote growth of employment opportunities. This argument is further supported by the fact that industries have been moving out of cities.

x) Roy and Pradhan (2018) observed that a vast number of CTs identified in the 2011 Census, will not be able to sustain to be urban in the future and in the long-run and therefore are likely to be declassified as CTs in the forthcoming census. However, what is also true is that a number of new villages are likely to be identified as CTs. Further, Revi et al. (2016) presented the concept of RUrbanism which addresses the issues related with large village settlements. Their paper

emphasized the significance of interconnectedness amid the rural and urban communities. The rural areas are unable to meet the multidimensional goals required for sustainable development which encompasses – good quality living standards, a flourishing economy, and sustainable use of resources and formation of waste. The paper emphasizes on equalizing the living standards of rural areas with that of the urban areas.

A number of studies have pointed out the inclusions and exclusions of CTs on account of the stringent definition and also highlighted the exclusion of large village settlements, thereby, leaving a lot of ambiguity. As a matter of great importance is the recommendation of the Fourteenth Finance Commission (2015-2020), which laid stress on the need for conversion of CTs to Statutory ULBs leading to entitlement of states to central assistance. This transformation will help both governance and service delivery of basic amenities for CTs. Further, in May 2016, the Press Information Bureau (PIB) released by the Ministry of Urban Development directed the state governments to convert CTs to ULBs to facilitate strategic development of infrastructure and better service delivery of basic amenities. Jadhav (2016) indicated that while the state of Maharashtra positively responded and granted ULB status to 19 census towns in Pune region, other states have been reluctant to undertake this transformation. While Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra adopt the population threshold of 25,000 to 30,000 for recognising and classifying an area as urban, such classifications again vary from state to state. Since the final decision of granting statutory status to CTs lies with the state governments, this results in heterogeneity across states and arbitrary manner of governance (Tandel and Hiranandani, 2016).

We can therefore conclude that the evolving and unregulated growth of these large settlements are the result of the inflexible definitions of “urban” with respect to their conversion into CTs by the state government.

3. Creating Sustainable, Liveable and Resilient Census Towns and Large Settlements

The present segment defines the overarching development framework for urban India, which has progressively evolved, and thus explores how the same can be suitably incorporated to address the emerging challenges and the dynamics of the CTs and large village settlements. The future governance of such settlements should incorporate the broad principles of development which are guided by the following: i) SDGs, ii) Climate Change and iii) Liveability Indicators which are to a large extent embedded in the 18 functions carried out by the ULBs. With CTs and large village settlements falling into the grey areas of the missing middle, a defined framework will be crucial.

Development encompasses growth, inclusion, sustainability and well-being—incorporating the overarching objective of *leaving no one behind (LNOB)*. This is well entrenched in the SDGs adopted by the United Nations and signed by 193 member states.⁹ While Goal 11 is explicitly dedicated to “urban,” discussing the need to create *Sustainable Cities Communities*, Goal 6

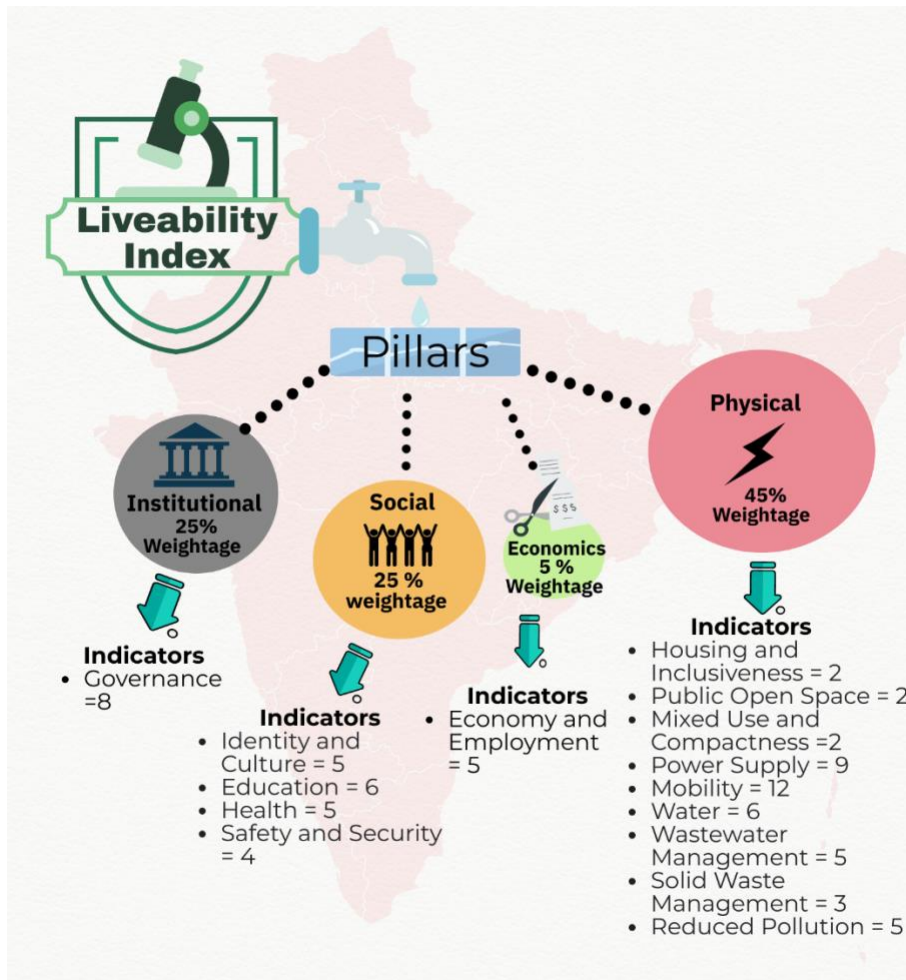
⁹ SDGs - <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/envision2030.html>

highlights the need to guarantee accessibility, sustainable use of water, sanitation, which has a strong linkages with public health. Goal 7 focuses on matters concerning access to economical, consistent , ecological and modern energy for all, impacting service delivery and the liveability of the citizenry. Likewise, Goal 13 emphasises on climate action. A number of indicators applicable to urban or for that matter large rural areas (which include large settlements) are addressed in the agenda.

Another important factor to be noted is that cities and built environments account for nearly 70 % of the global greenhouse gas emissions and its ensuing climate change to be one of the major crises poised to threaten human settlements, its ecology and environment. It is therefore important that the emerging CTs and large settlements are envisioned and planned to be sustainable and resilient towns and communities. This is in sync with the Paris Agreement which calls for suitable action plans that need to be implemented in order to mitigate and adapt to the challenges posed by climate change.

In 2018, The Ministry of Urban Development introduced a liveability index, with a defined framework as shown in Figure 1. The index is composed of four pillars a) Institutional b) Social c) Economic and d) Physical - each pillar having their individual weights and sub-indices.

Liveability Index



Source: Liveability standards for cities, MoUD, GoI, 2017

The World Bank Report (2015) described India’s urbanisation process as hidden and messy, this can be perfectly applicable to our present study, wherein, both the CTs and large villages are hidden in the urban framework. While CTs are counted as urban, they are governed by rural bodies; and the large settlements are counted as rural but have urban-like characteristics. Both are messy because they do not conform to the benchmarks and measures of liveability which is rightfully due to the people living in these settlements.

Going a step further, the CTs need to be in sync with the 18 urban functions as defined by Article-243W, 74 CAA, 1992¹⁰. However, since they are governed by the rural local bodies which adhere

¹⁰ Article 243 W- [TWELFTH SCHEDULE](#)

to the schedule 11(Article- 243G, 73 CAA, 1992)¹¹ and therefore this rural- urban conundrum persists. This has impacted the quality of liveability of approximately 72.18 million living in CTs and 208 million living in large villages (grey areas), making them increasingly vulnerable. While a plethora of central and state government policy interventions exists providing financial assistance to address the various rural and urban development challenges, it was only in 2003 when Providing Urban Amenities to Rural Areas (PURA) was introduced and the initiative worked within the framework of Public Private Partnership (PPP) between the gram panchayats and private enterprises. PURA worked as a guiding principle for regeneration of economics and allied activities in rural areas, emphasizing on providing basic amenities such as water supply, waste disposal, well-lit streets, cesspool, solid waste management, energy supply and undertaking monetary and skill enhancement pursuits. (PURA, MoRD)

Further, in February 2016, the Government of India under the Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD), introduced Shyama Prasad Mukherji Rurban Mission (SPMRM): RURBAN- which adopted integrated development initiative via development of clusters—made up of geographically contiguous villages. The scheme aims at preserving rural identity while ensuring adequate provision of urban facilities, thereby bridging the rural urban divide via creation of efficient RURBAN clusters (SPMRM, GoI). In 2020, after reviewing the success of the RURBAN scheme the ministry is aiming to add 1000 urbanized clusters for strengthening the RURBAN mission (Mishra, 2020).

The scheme design included 300 Rurban clusters which would be developed in a defined time framework. The focus of these clusters is on selecting interventions based on the following components; “ i) Sanitation, (ii) Piped Water Supply, (iii) Solid and Liquid Waste Management, (iv) Village Street Lights and Electrification, (v) Access to Village Streets With Drains, (vi) Inter Village Roads Connectivity, (vii) Public Transport, (viii) Skill Development Training Linked to Economic Activities, (ix) Agri-Services Processing and Allied Activities, (x) Health, (xi) Education, (xii) Digital Literacy, (xiii) Citizens Service Centres, (xiv) LPG Gas Connection, (xv) Environment, (xvi) Employment Generation and SHG Formation, (xvii) Tourism Promotion, (xviii) Sports Infrastructure, (xix) Social Infrastructure, (xx) Rural Housing, (xxi) Social Welfare” (Press Information Bureau, GoI, 2020).

¹¹ 11th schedule of 73rd Amendment Act, Directives for Panchayats Article 243G, <http://www.mea.gov.in/Images/pdf1/S11.pdf>

1. Conclusions

The paper brings to light the case of the increasing number of CTs, which are defined as urban but governed by structures having limited scope, with respect to capability, capacity and access to own finances. The same can be stated for very large and large village settlements which failed to be recognized as urban and are falling short of the benchmark of the quality of urban services that are crucial for the people. The urban-rural conundrum needs to be revisited and work towards equalizing the living standards of these settlements. While the existing governance structures of these settlements seeming gloomy and paradoxical - the major implications are a) to recognise the urban-like characteristics of these settlements b) to adhere to global definitions of urban, with respect to cities, small towns and rural c) put in place strong governance structures which should emerge from the district, taluka or tehsil (sub district level); it is a matter of deliberation as the existing settlement levels may be too small for smart governance d) making adequate financial provision of urban services to enhance liveability.

While the introduction of the SPMRM is the step in the right direction and has been scaled up in 2020 – it should encompass:

- a) “Ability to include social and ecological function of land - in order to protect, conserve and restore
- b) Right to adequate and affordable housing
- c) Right to adequate standard of living - with access to safe drinking water and sanitation
- d) Food security and nutrition
- e) Social infrastructure - Health, education and social security
- f) Physical infrastructure - access to energy, mobility and transportation, air quality and livelihood
- g) Green public spaces
- h) Civic engagement and working towards prioritising safety, inclusion (gender and all the vulnerable sections of society, resilience (disaster risk reduction), social cohesion and pluralistic societies,
- i) Sustainable economic growth
- j) Planning and implementation”, for all of the above

If these basic tenets of new urban agenda are not incorporated, we will have on hand CTs and large settlement which are palimpsests¹² and Janus like –continuing the process of undoing, improvising and self-regulating

¹² Palimpsests is a key subject matter in urbanisation, it explains Urbanisation as a complex cultural phenomenon <https://hum54-15.omeka.fas.harvard.edu/exhibitlimpsest - Taking a Step Back>

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